



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Lisa Richardson, 213-361-6980

Email: lrichardson@bos.lacounty.gov

Contact: Lorenza Munoz, 213-974-2222

Email: lmunoz@bos.lacounty.gov

Board Seeks to Help Chronically Homeless

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors wants to make it easier for people who are chronically homeless to find help and shelter. Because people in this population often have a criminal history, suffer from substance abuse and mental health issues, they can face extraordinary hurdles when seeking public assistance. For example, people who are on parole and probation are not eligible for public housing. Also, current federal regulations now require a review of an applicants' criminal background dating back for three years, something that has presented a challenge in helping many who are chronically homeless receive help.

So, in a motion co-authored by Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas and Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, the county is asking the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to develop a program that would allow local housing officials to reduce the current criminal background check period and allow individuals who are on parole and probation to apply.

"We must help these folks return into society in a way that is safe, humane and cost effective," said Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas. "Affording them a chance at shelter can play an important part in their success."

This change would be similar to one that has been implemented for veterans through the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program. A statutory change should be pursued to allow the chronically homeless population to apply for housing while also receiving needed assistance with substance abuse, mental health services and job training at or near the shelter.

Advocates for the homeless testified at the meeting Tuesday, saying that giving people shelter, mental health and substance abuse assistance is the most cost effective and humane way to treat homelessness.

“We do know is that parolees with decent housing are much less likely to re-offend than are parolees who are forced into homelessness,” said Ruth Schwartz, executive director of the advocacy group, Shelter Partnership, Inc.

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